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"REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE."

BY

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"REPENTANCE unto life" is a scripture phrase, signifying the same as "repentance unto salvation." He who exercises it shall never die; shall surely be saved. With it is connected "remission of sins," and so, life everlasting. The necessity of repentance is generally conceded. Even some infidels have confessed it. Yet its nature is not always understood. In some minds there is sad confusion on this subject.

What is repentance unto life? What may we know respecting it? From 2 Tim. 2: 25, it is evident that it is *the gift of God*. From Acts 5: 31, it is clear that it is the fruit of *Christ's mediation*. And from Zech. 12: 10, it appears to be the product of *the Spirit's power*. He, who believes that merely in his own strength, without power from on high, he can subdue his own spirit, melt his own heart, change his own will, and turn from his old sins, miserably deceives himself. No mere apprehension of danger ever effectually leads to holiness. Men cannot be frightened out of their sins. Nor can any persuasions ever prevail over the soul, and turn it to God, until the Lord fulfils the gracious promise, "I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and I will give them a heart of flesh." Nature can shed many bitter tears, but it is the new nature that weeps tears of genuine penitence. He

who is finally forsaken of God will never have repentance unto life.

Nor is true repentance brought about by carnal reasonings, by worldly motives, by natural truths, but by *God's word*, written or spoken. Thus Nathan the prophet called David to repentance. Thus Peter on the day of Pentecost aroused the minds and touched the hearts of many, by a close Scriptural argument. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." A change of heart, which puts no honour on God's word, will result in no lasting amendment. If the Spirit is the Agent, the word is the instrument of repentance. Other things may affect us, but the truth of God renews us. With it we are begotten of God.

In genuine repentance, men see and feel not only that sin may be their ruin, but that it is *in itself vile and hateful.* Many carnal men know that unpardoned sin blots out every hope of heaven, but it is only the spiritually minded who perceive its hideous deformity. The worst thing that can be said of sin is, not that hell follows in its train, but that it is "exceeding sinful." True, it destroys the soul; but it does worse—it dishonours God. Therefore the genuine penitent remembers his own evil ways, and his doings that were not good, and loathes himself for his iniquities and for his abominations. Yea, he is confounded, and never opens his mouth any more, because of his shame, when God is pacified towards him for all that he has done. The great deficiency in the religious exercises of many is a sad blindness concerning the evil of sin. It is madness; it is a plague; it is rebellion; it would dethrone Jehovah;

it "would subjugate heaven, earth and hell to itself: it would make the universe the minion of its lusts, and all beings bow down and worship."

Nor is it merely or chiefly a wicked life that is repented of. One who is taught of God will deplore *his fallen nature.* It was so with David: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." He, who laments actual sin, but not original, regrets that the fruit is bad, but foolishly thinks the tree good—confesses that the stream is bitter, but alleges that the fountain is sweet. He deplores certain effects, but cares not for their dreadful cause. True repentance respects all sin.

It also has in it real *sorrow for sin.* When Ephraim repented, he bemoaned himself; when he was turned, he repented; when he was instructed, he smote upon his thigh. This sorrow is not of a worldly, but of a godly sort. It works not death, but a repentance never to be repented of; it is not legal, nor merely the result of terrors, it is evangelical; it flows far more from an apprehension of mercy than of wrath. "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn." Nothing breaks and melts the heart of man like a view of *Christ crucified.* It slew the enmity of three thousand souls on the day of Pentecost. "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." He, who will not be won by love, cannot be saved. Nor is the true penitent afraid of weeping too much, or of humbling himself too much. His fears are just the opposite.

Genuine repentance always results in *turning from all sin unto God,* and in begetting honest purposes and hearty endeavours after a life of holiness. A new heart is naturally followed by new obedience; how could it be otherwise? No widow will harbor the murderer of

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her beloved husband; no one bitten of a serpent ever likes to handle, or even look upon the venomous creature. The penitent always walks softly; he esteems all God's precepts concerning all things to be right; he hates vain thoughts; he hates every false way. If in his eyes a thing is sinful, he will eschew it, though it be lucrative, popular, or vastly tempting to the natural desires of the mind. Repentance not ending in reformation is worthless. Devils have that kind of regret and sorrow; but they never turn to God, never renounce iniquity. "He, truly repents of the sins he has committed, who does not commit the sins he has repented of."

Nothing is more unwise than to *delay* repentance. Augustine says, "The repentance of a dying man often dies with him." Speaking of a death-bed repentance, Ambrose says, "I will counsel no man to trust to it, because I am loath to deceive any man, seeing I know not what to think of it. Shall I judge such a one a castaway? Neither will I declare him safe. All I am able to say is, let his state be left to the will and pleasure of Almighty God. Wilt thou therefore be delivered of all doubt? Repent while yet thou art healthy and strong. If thou defer it till time give no longer possibility of sinning, thou canst not be thought to quit sin, but sin has rather quit thee." "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." "The night cometh when no man can work." "God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." Wilt thou be made clean? When shall it once be?

"THERE IS JOY IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ANGELS OF GOD OVER ONE SINNER THAT REPENTETH."

"GOD NOW COMMANDETH ALL MEN EVERYWHERE TO REPENT."

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